Representing Others and Analyzing Oneself: Travel Writings of D. H. Lawrence and T. E. Lawrence

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The aim of this paper is to clarify the characteristics of the travel writings of D. H. Lawrence and T. E. Lawrence, and their contributions to the genre of travel writing.

Let me start from the relationship between the two authors. Though contemporaries, and both well known in their respective circle, they never met. But T.E. was a keen reader of D. H.'s books, having most of his published books, including the privately printed *Women in Love and Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In 1927, when T. E. was stationed in India, he was asked by Francis Yeats-Brown, the Literary Editor of the *Spectator*, to do a book review. Then he answered: "D. H. Lawrence I'll be delighted to have a try at. I've read all his stuff since *The White Peacock*."(1) T. E. made some other remarks on D. H.'s works, for example:

> What D. H. Lawrence means by *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is that the idea of sex, and the whole strong vital instinct, being considered indecent causes men to lose what might be their vital strength and pride of life—their integrity. Conversely, the idea of 'genitals being beauty' in the Blakean sense would free humanity from its lowering and disintegrating immorality of deed and thought. Lawrence wilted and was made writhen by the 'miners-chapel-dirty-little-boy, you' environment: he was ruined by it: and in most of his work he is striving to strengthen himself, and to become beautiful. Ironically, or paradoxic-

ally, in a humanity where 'genitals are beauty' there would be a minimum of 'sex' and a maximum of beauty, or Art. This is what Lawrence means, surely.[2]

He also praised *The Plumed Serpent* to David Garnett as early as 1928, when the novel didn't receive such a warm review: "I call the form of *The Plumed Serpent* very shapely and satisfying: and the architecture of most of his novels excellent."[3]

How about D. H.'s view of T. E.? Though the latter was a famous figure after World War I, D. H. never mentioned him except in one case. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Connie explained to her father about Mellors: "'. . . he was an officer in the army in India. Only he is like Colonel C. E. Florence, who preferred to become a private soldier again.'"[4] It is obvious that "Colonel C. E. Florence" has a strong echo of T. E. Lawrence. D. H.'s treatment of T.E. here is rather positive, but he immediately adds: "Sir Malcolm, however, had no sympathy with the unsatisfactory mysticism of the famous C. E. Florence. He saw too much advertisement behind all the humility. It looked just like the sort of conceit the knight most loathed, the conceit of self-abasement." The latter comment apparently refers to T. E.'s escape from the sensation evoked by the series of travelogue, with slides and motion pictures, by Lowell Thomas, entitled "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia." It was a phenomenal success, and made Lawrence a hero, or a myth. Though disgusted by becoming a hero, T. E. at the same time had a secret joy: he was said to go to Thomas's show several times. Then he became a private soldier in the RAF with a disguised name of John Hume Ross, as if to escape from the maddening sensation about him.

Now, let's turn our eyes to their writings. I will discuss here D. H.'s *Twilight in Italy* and T. E.'s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, in particular. They have many points in common: both a record of their experiences abroad;

their description is, as Jeffrey Meyers says of D. H.'s travel writing, "a means of exploring his own inner nature."(5) That is to say, their major concern, in T. E.'s case a hidden but strong concern, is to understand who they are and the meaning of their existence, as well as to reveal to themselves the true nature of Western civilization in the reflection of their experiences in Italy and Arabia.

One of the characteristics of D. H. Lawrence's description, or representation, of the Italian people is the way that he symbolizes them. He has his own philosophical questions that his characters personify. One of the best examples is the chapter "The Spinner and the Monks." Here the chapter begins with a philosophical, or a theological, premise: "The Holy Spirit is a Dove, or an Eagle."(6) He is preoccupied with this question, a question of dualism, a principle that, to him, governs the whole universe. He wants to reveal its secrets, the solution of which seems to him the solution for the major predicaments of human beings. Then he finds an old lady who is spinning on the terrace in front of San Tommaso, the church of the Eagle. At first glance, "she made me feel as if I were not in existence... She was like a fragment of earth, she was a living stone of the terrace, sun-bleached" (p.105). Though he talks to her a little, his impression of her never changes, but rather, is reinforced. To him she becomes a symbol of the fixed, unconscious, stone-like world: "Her world was clear and absolute, without consciousness of self. She was not self-conscious, because she was not aware that there was anything in the universe except her universe" (p.107). In many cases, to D. H. "self-consciousness" is a negative thing, or anathema, making one conscious of oneself so that it hinders one from acting naturally and spontaneously. But here, her being not self-conscious functions on a different level: it excludes everything except her own world; or, she absorbs everything into her world. She has no division between the self of her own and others'. She is turned into a symbol of this "single-in-the-world-

ness," so to say, being compared to the sun. Lawrence says: "She was herself the core and centre to the world, the sun, and the single firmament" (p.107). This equation with the sun doesn't refer to anything positive here: it rather refers to being static, without movement or change that he so much praises. He says: "And she, the old spinning-woman, was the apple, eternal, unchangeable, whole even in her partiality" (p.108). This characteristic is strongly associated with such negative tendencies as having "a sharp will," "to dominate me," and to "deny my existence." Thus his first impression is justified.

In front of the woman, who is represented as the sun, he feels himself like "the moon" (p.109), and runs away. Then he saw two monks walking in their garden. Here his first impression of them is sympathy: "I was one with them, a partaker..." (p.111). In contrast with the sun-woman, he seems to belong to the same world as they do, to "Another world," the world of "the cold, rare night." Towards the twilight, "a frail moon had put forth," and they, including Lawrence himself, are in the moon-world. And yet, the monks begin to seem to him a symbol of neutrality: "Neither the flare of day nor the completeness of night reached them, they paced the narrow path of the twilight, treading in the neutrality of the law. Neither the blood nor the spirit spoke in them, only the law, the abstraction of the average. The infinite is positive and negative. But the average is only neutral" (p.112). Then he deepens his contemplation, saying: "After all, eternal not-being and eternal being are the same. In the rosy snow that shone in heaven over a darkened earth was the ecstasy of consummation. Night and day are one, light and dark are one, both the same in the origin and in the issue, both the same in the moment of ecstasy, light fused in darkness and darkness fused in light, as in the rosy snow above the twilight." In this book, twilight signifies both "consummation" and "neutrality," but they are never the same. And the twilight symbolized by the monks is not consummation but neu-

trality, a negative "uniting sun and darkness" (p.113). There are two ways to bring the two antithetical elements together: one is putting them against each other in sharp distinction; each expresses its own superiority but never destroys the other. And the other one is putting them side by side in neutrality, letting them stay as they are without any fierce insistence. In the former case, violent struggles may occur, but the issue may be consummation and thus ecstasy. In the latter, peace may prevail but nothing creative springs up. That's what Lawrence calls "the law of the average," in which "the flesh neutralizing the spirit, the spirit neutralizing the flesh."

The main point I want to make clear here is Lawrence's treatment of living figures for his philosophical inquiries. Through the encounters with these people in a foreign place, he tries to clarify his concern: how to go beyond dualism. As in "The Crown," generally he is never tired of insisting on the importance of the struggle itself between the two opposing forces or elements. But at times, he points out the ultimate importance of uniting these two; and one of the clear statements is seen in this travel writing. Here he says: "The two infinites, negative and positive, they are always related, but they are never identical. They are always opposite, but there is a relation between them. This is the Holy Ghost of the Christian Trinity. And it is this, the relation which is established between the two Infinites, the two Natures of God, which we have transgressed, forgotten, sinned against.... To say that the Two are One, this is the inadmissible lie. The Two are related, by the intervention of the Third, into a Oneness" (p.126).

This finding of a perfect relatedness, or a balance, between the two eternally opposing elements, is reached through his contemplation; and the contemplation is stimulated by facing the "foreign" or the "other," either the place or the people. In other words, his thought is deepened through depicting and representing the "other" by the eyes of an outsider.

He says: "... the dark-skinned Italians ecstatic in the night and the moon, the blue-eyed old woman ecstatic in the busy sunshine, the monks in the garden below, who are supposed to unite both, passing only in the neutrality of the average" (p.113). The three parties are allotted their own roles for the sake of his philosophy. In fact, this passage works as an introduction to the following question, to him an essential, and imminent one: "Where, then, is the meeting-point: where in mankind is the ecstasy of light and dark together... Where is the supreme ecstasy in mankind, which makes day a delight and night a delight,... uniting sun and darkness, day and night, spirit and senses? Why do we not know that the two in consummation are one; that each is only part; partial and alone for ever; but that the two in consummation are perfect, beyond the range of loneliness or solitude?"

Let us turn our eye to T. E. Lawrence. His *opus magnum, The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, appears to be a record of the Arab Revolt to which he was involved in a complicated way. But in the deeper layers of the book can be seen different aspects: the record of Lawrence's own struggle for self revelation, and eventually saving himself. Saving from what? From various predicaments he found himself in. Probably the major one, which made his life such a complicated one, was his sense of guilt: he was born as an illegitimate child. His father was Robert Tighe Chapman, an Earl of West Mirth in Ireland, who eloped with the governess of his children, Sarah Junner, to Wales. They changed their name to Lawrence, and had five sons, of whom Thomas Edward was the second. And, maybe partly because of the sense of sin, his mother raised her children with very strict Christian, or puritanical, ethics. Later T. E. tried hard to extricate himself from these, the struggle which reminds us of D. H.'s similar efforts.

After graduating from Oxford, he was asked by Dr. Hogarth, the Director of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, to join the excavation team at

Carchemish in the Near East. His days there were very happy, but when the First World War took place, he joined the army and was sent to Egypt as an intelligent officer. Thus he was involved in the imperialistic movements of the British to evoke the Arabs into the revolt against the Turks who were supported by the Germans. According to his record, he was eventually accepted as one of the leaders of the Arab forces which were a mixture of the different, and sometimes opposing, tribes. Lawrence showed a brilliant ability to bring them together into one purpose: this is the mythified figure of Lawrence, which is later reinforced by David Lean's famous film.

How did he observe and represent the Arabs. He says:

> Semites had no half-tones in their register of vision. They were a people of primary colours, or rather of black and white, who saw the world always in contour. They were dogmatic people, despising doubt, our modern crown of thorns. They did not understand our metaphysical difficulties, our introspective questionings. They knew only truth and untruth, belief and unbelief, without our hesitating retinue of finer shades.... They were a limited, narrow-minded people, whose inert intellects lay fallow in incurious resignation. Their imaginations were vivid, but not creative.(7)

The strong affinity with D. H. Lawrence's vision of the Italian people is striking. Both the Arabs and the Italians look to them less intelligent and intellectual, more physical and simple. The Italians are sensual, believing only in the body, and the Arabs despise doubt, the very product of the modern intellect. They are both characterized as antithetical groups of people who have very different, or opposite, beliefs and Weltanschauung from Northern races. What is more remarkable is the tone of representing these people: both D. H. and T. E. show a twisted attitude about

such simplicity. They admire it while at the same time have an air of being superior, looking down upon it as backwards.

In fact, this ambivalent attitude towards the "foreign" or the "other" is what they share. But how such ambivalence affects them is quite different. D. H. tends to put stress on the beneficial side of this sort of encounter. He repeatedly writes why English people, or Northerners in general, are attracted by the Italians, and what they should learn from them. But T. E.'s feeling and interpretation about what takes place when the two foreign parties meet sounds quite different. He says:

> In my case, the efforts for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only. Easily was a man made an infidel, but hardly might he be converted to another faith. I had dropped one form and not taken on the other, and was become like Mohammed's coffin in our legend, with a resulting feeling of intense loneliness in life, and a contempt, not for other men, but for all they do. Such detachment came at times to a man exhausted by prolonged physical effort and isolation. His body plodded on mechanically, while his reasonable mind left him, and from without looked down critically on him, wondering what that futile lumber did and why. Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, as I believe it would be near the man who could see things through the veils at once of two customs, two educations, two environments.(8)

T. E. admits that, through living with the Arabs, he comes to have a "double-vision," so to speak: now he sees what he took for granted with "new

eyes." But he doesn't interpret the experiences as beneficial. He instead says that the fundamental change of a man is nearly impossible. On the contrary, such a new vision eventually makes him feel detached from the surroundings and hence lonely; and worse still, it makes him feel contempt for what people do. He even feels that one may come near madness, and the madness is caused by the double-vision itself. His self is divided, and thus becomes conscious of itself.

T. E. Lawrence's representation of the Arabs serves as a vital clue to analyzing himself. An Arab writer Suleiman Mousa criticizes, in his interesting book *T. E. Lawrence: An Arab View* (1962), that Lawrence's description of the battle scenes or operations are many times wrong, or at least not precise, and even suggests Lawrence's intention of making himself a hero with such favorable descriptions. In my opinion, discussing whether Lawrence's description of the war is correct or not is futile, because his writing is a form of representation of what he experienced and is not aimed at an exact historical record. In a way it is a history of his self-analysis, and he himself admits it. In the Introductory Chapter of *Seven Pillars*, he says: "In these pages the history is not of the Arab movement, but of me in it."(9) He also tells Robert Graves: "[*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*] is a full-length and unrestrained portrait of myself, and my tastes and ideas and actions."(10)

It seems to me that Edward Said has made a similar mistake in interpreting Lawrence's representation of the Arabs. In his *Orientalism* (1978), he discusses several passages from Lawrence's letters or *Seven Pillars*, and concludes that Lawrence represented the Arabs in a wrong way, reducing them to a single, and simple, entity, who had learned nothing from their long history. In short, he criticizes Lawrence's "projection" of whatever he wanted to see on the Arabs. But representation is in a way projecting what the observer wants to see on the object. Or rather, representation is creation. In fact, Said himself admits that "representation is

formation," or, by quoting Roland Barthes's phrase, that "representation is deformation." That is, representation can never be an objective reproduction of the things observed. It is the observer's reconstruction from the materials he gathered. It is bound to be subjective, and hence no use criticizing its lack of objectivity. Of course it doesn't mean that you can say anything about what you saw. But if the attitude is felt to be sincere and without ill intention, the text should be read as not the exact description of the object, but the mental construction of the author. And this is exactly why the most interesting parts of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* are not the battle scenes, or various aspects of operations, which occupy a large portion of the book, but the parts where he struggles to come to self revelation.

In D. H.'s travel writings, especially in *Twilight in Italy*, there is less tendency of such self-analysis. He uses his observations of the people to represent, or symbolize, his ideas. And as far as this particular book is concerned, his attempt seems to work fine. His representation of the people and the places, in a way, makes his philosophy a bit schematic, that is, everything he sees is classified into either side of his dualism. But, at the same time, it certainly helps to deepen his ideas concerning the dualistic nature of man and world.

Reflecting upon their own experiences abroad, both D. H. and T. E. came to see the familiar things, the West and its civilization, which so fiercely stifled them, "with new eyes." And this is a major achievement in itself. But what is more fundamental in their travel writings is that they shed light on the question of "representation." As discussed earlier, representing the object, the "other," is not the objective, camera-like reproduction of it. It cannot be. Neither is it a pure fiction. Their writings show that every bit of description of the object is bound to be a representation, that is the recreation of the object, or rather the creation itself. What both D. H. Lawrence and T. E. Lawrence does in their travel books

is that through representing the "other" they analyze oneself and the reality of civilization they were born into. This is a major contribution of the two writers to the further development of the genre of travel writing.

Notes

(1) *T. E. Lawrence: The Selected Letters*, ed. Malcolm Brown (New York: Norton, 1989), p.337.

(2) John E. Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder: The Life of T. E. Lawrence*, pp. 425-26. (3/25/1930)

(3) *T. E. Lawrence: The Selected Letters*, p. 368.

(4) D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), p.281.

(5) Jeffrey Meyers, *D. H. Lawrence and the Experience of Italy*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p.12.

(6) D. H. Lawrence, *Twilight in Italy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997), p.103. Page references in the text refer to this edition throughout.

(7) T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962), p.36.

(8) *Ibid.*, p.30.

(9) *Ibid.*, p.22.

(10) Jeffrey Meyers, *The Wounded Spirit: A Study of* Seven Pillars of Wisdom (London: Martin Brian & O'Keefe, 1973), p.131.